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INTERSECTING CAREERS OF WORK AND NON-WORK AMONG A MOBILE POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the interface of the careers of work and marriage-family among new workers in an energy-related impacted community in Wyoming. This impact has brought many changes to the Rocky Mountain West, including the migration of thousands of persons to fill the jobs created by the extraction, processing and construction operations. The research involves an empirically grounded examination of the stages in the work career of these largely manual, often mobile workers and the process of marriage-family that confronts and frequently conflicts with the conditions of work. In terms of these two careers, the research seeks to determine the major structural conditions of the population's lives, the points and processes of major decisions, and the modes of adaptation to these conditions.

The Focus on Social Impact

The October 3, 1969 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* called Wyoming "the lonesome land" whose "economy lags as people move away." Wyoming's estimated population decreased between 1960 and 1970,[1] as did only three other states: the two Dakotas and West Virginia. The article predicted that new industry would be lured to the state by encouraging the extraction of Wyoming's mineral resources, thus reviving the faltering economy. By the mid-1970s the prediction had become reality. The boosterism of a new governorship and the increased demand for oil, gas, uranium and coal due to the world's "energy crisis" created a situation in Wyoming and western states of unprecedented growth. Extraction of minerals and construction of processing facilities as well as electric generating plants produced radical changes in many areas of Wyoming and the West (e.g., Snell, 1974; Gold, 1974).

These events have not been dealt with uncritically. Environmental concern for pollution of the streams, of the underground water systems and the atmosphere, and for the depletion of water resources in general has been strongly and actively expressed. The surface (strip) mining of coal, uranium, and other minerals has generated legal battles and environmental research on many fronts. The economics of this new situation has generated debate at every level, from the personal to the federal.

Changes in the social circumstances of these areas are rapid, often unanticipated or poorly prepared for, and are a serious concern of the affected population. These areas have been dominated by agriculture, particularly ranching, both economically and socially. The mountains have created a tourist-based economy in many areas. These communities, once fairly static in terms of population and culture, are now in a state of flux.

The human community is undergoing rapid change. The ranching way of life has been challenged (Gold, 1974). The traditional social relations and accompanying values are accepted by fewer and fewer people who find it increasingly difficult to maintain dominant positions in the communities. Not only is the heteronomous relationship to the distant seats of industrial and political authority providing this threat (Bass, 1976); the communities are being transformed by new people whose skills, values and interests are often incongruent with the traditions of the area. These changes have generated much interest, but few serious analyses. (Notable exceptions include: Old West Regional Commission, 1976; Blevins, Thompson & Ellis, 1974; Gilmore & Duff, 1974.)

The newcomers (i.e., those who have come with the energy development) in impacted areas are commonly discussed in terms of social pathologies. The infamous notion of the "Gillette Syndrome" (Kohrs, 1974) has been uncritically applied to them, capturing a neat cluster of characteristics that state in clinical terms the prejudices toward and misconceptions about them. Divorce, emotional damage, depression and suicide, delinquency, alcoholism, boredom and frustration are the terms most often applied to the new people (Gold, 1974). Authors have written of the "4 Ds" of the Gillette Syndrome: drunkenness, delinquency, depression and divorce (Christiansen & Clark, 1976), linking these pathologies to the mobile homes and trailer courts that house many of the newcomers (Gilmore, 1976). This is unfortunate, for it--like all prejudices and stereotypes--is factual enough to satisfy only the uncritical observer while contributing to the distrust and lack of coordinated activity that hinder improving the quality of life in these communities. Oversimplification provides an inaccurate portrait that is unacceptable, whether one is seeking practical goals for the community or is committed to truth and understanding through social science research.

The Current Study

Since May of last year a research project has attempted to gain a better understanding of the new people in energy-related impacted areas of Wyoming.[2] The research, involving extensive participant observation, informal interviewing, survey interviewing, and the analysis of documentary materials, involves the generation of grounded theory models to provide a coherent and valid understanding of this population.[3]

These persons were studied for several reasons. First, their movement to and life within these small, rural communities provides a major element effecting the style and quality of life. They are experiencing the social impact of rapid population growth, underdeveloped social services, fiscal uncertainty, and the shifting economic base more so perhaps than persons indigenous to the communities. To indigenous persons, the new people are often perceived as *the* source of disruption in social impact. These are strangers, transients with seemingly different ways, who are here for the 'big money', with no concern about what happens to the community. *They* are creating the real problems, as perceived by many persons in and outside the community.

Secondly, this research concerns an interesting portion of the labor force in Western industrial societies. Geographic and job movement are significant facts in the lives of most blue- and white-collar workers today. The higher frequency of movement among portions of the study population provides a clearer understanding of how such movement comes about, is dealt with, and affects persons' lives. The questions are fairly basic. Why are *these* persons here, rather than others? Is work career effected by the possibilities available to the transient person, or is it simply a diverse career, made diverse by conditions that have little to do with movement per se (cf. Leggett,

1968: Chapter 4)? How does this movement affect outlooks, values, political and social beliefs, and work orientations of these men and women? What is the direction and strength of the relationship between movement and one's marital-family situation? When and how are major decisions made, within the context of the experiences and structural conditions that influence their lives? As a study of labor, this research begins to answer these and other questions and contributes to a better understanding of labor in industrial society.

Very little is actually known about these new people. Without this understanding, planning and policy decisions very likely may be misdirected or erroneous. Importantly, distance and distrust between newcomers and older residents increases as population increases. There is no solution to problems that demand concerted action, and resentment colors many facets of community life.

Understanding this population of workers involves an open approach. It seeks not to test particular theories or hypotheses about workers but to generate grounded theory models that, with further research and understanding, will contribute to an understanding of the process of work and non-work and the interrelationship of these. The research assumes that there are good reasons why one works at a certain task, with a certain style, and that work has consequences for the person beyond the work setting. The total life experience of the worker and his or her family becomes understandable only when one relates this work to the non-work world of the person's life.

This paper explores one facet of the connection between work and non-work: the interactive phases of work career and marital-family career. The research reported here is in a formative stage and cannot properly be designated a theory. Still, it points to the fruitfulness of marshalling data in

such a way that questions are answered (satisfying the purpose of theory) and unappreciated facts take on explanatory significance. It is grounded in the ongoing process of the research act and the emerging data. Its test presently involves theoretical clarification and the search for alternative explanations and contradicting facts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Newcomers in Impacted Areas

A collective portrait of the new people in the initial study community has been drawn from qualitative and quantitative data. Approximately 400 pages of field notes - interviews and observations - and 144 formal interviews describe these workers and their families.

The population of the community has increased from about 2,700 persons in 1970 to over 6,000 in December 1976; most of this increase occurred in the last three years. Among the sample of new persons (a designation given to persons in the community less than five years) formally interviewed in this work, over fifty percent (59 of 114 males and 46 of 86 females) lived there less than one year. Ninety percent (103 of 114 males and 76 of 86 females) lived there less than three years. They are undoubtedly recent movers, but are they 'transients'? Fifty-six percent of them (62 of 113 males and 49 of 84 females) lived in their previous communities four years or longer. Of those indicating length of stay in their next to last residence, fifty-six percent (54 of 94 males and 35 of 63 females) lived there four years or longer. Conversely, twenty-three percent of them (27 of 113 males, 19 of 84 females) lived in their previous communities less than two years, and twenty-four percent (26 of 94 males, 12 of 63 females) lived in their next to last communities less than two years. What this begins to indicate is significant

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[illegible] These nearly always pay $65 to $90 a month for rental. Those who rent usually pay $250 to $300 a month for two or three bedroom mobile homes.

Mobile homes were seldom as unattractive as is commonly supposed. Many homes were quite expensively furnished and nearly all were clean and reasonably comfortable. Still, cramped space for a family of four or more, close proximity of neighbors, and depreciation make a convention home more preferable. While incomes are fairly high, the cost of living (especially housing and transportation) means that most families only make ends meet. Those who are able to save and with plans for the immediate future are single persons or young couples without children.

The newcomers' lives are dominated by work. New people are more than preoccupied with their jobs. They are dominated. Pay changes, lost days [illegible] are much of the conversation and are the elements that affect most significant planning for these new people. Self-esteem, friends, trouble and failure are all tied in with the job. "Where are you working?" is invariably the first question asked when meeting anyone, anywhere. Work dominates the lives of these people in large part because work is insecure. Men are injured, laid off, switched to new jobs, told to work fewer or more hours with little if any notice. And, work is what these men know. It is what they do best. It is also--directly and indirectly--the source of their wives' pride and tribulations. Women identify themselves: "We're miners." or "We're an oil field family." This means more than husband's occupation; his occupation determines family identity.

theoretical models presents several research challenges. The author has related models on one data set, using the other for support rather than illumination. Both types of data are valuable, each helps in the understanding of the other, and both lend themselves to the emerging theoretical models. The qualitative data does not provide an explanation for statistical relationships established by the quantitative data, nor does the latter indicate the parameters for generalizing from the former. The theoretical models are generated and elaborated by analysis of both types of data, and both lend themselves to clarification and modification of the models. One model which involves juxtaposing the work and marriage-family cycles is beginning to explain much about the subject population.

Among manual and service workers in rural areas, seldom is there the kind of impersonality in work typical of large bureaucratic organizations. There is, however, a clear distinction between the dimensions of work and

[illegible] I'd [illegible] about [illegible]. The [illegible] cycles the wheat [illegible] to [illegible] in the fall, but you get out on the [illegible] and into a [illegible] mother. Then, there was this other guy. Man, [illegible] he'd pick a fight with anybody, even his own kinda. He'd [illegible] people; he didn't give a damn about nothin'. But I went to work for him, and he was a great driller. Would do anything for you, show you what to do, was real patient and never yelled. He'd joke around. A great guy.

Two personalities emerge, one for each world.

Attention focused on the relationship between the two worlds and what seemed problematic between them. Almost independently, an understanding of two careers surfaced, each career marked by major phases and points: a career of one's work and a career of marriage and family. Men spoke of their work, work histories, personal progress, and job skills. They spoke of their

Career of Work. The first phase of the career of work starts not when one is a certain age, but when one begins working at the kind of job that brings him to an impacted community. These jobs demand or encourage one to move, sometimes very frequently. In the first few years of work, good wages and freedom of movement are enjoyed as skills increase or movement from a less to a more desirable job occurs. After a period of three to five years, however, skills are mastered and the job, a major part of one's identity, begins to feel like one's station in life. Men begin to lose the sense of excitement that marked earlier work. Other things occur.

Movement often brings a new boss. As one's skills increase, tolerance [illegible] to a mental or [illegible] task may be met with [illegible]. Men begin to wonder if they really want to continue this line of work. It is not unusual to hear a man lament the decline of the amenities or the deterioration of the conditions that originally attracted him to the work.

"When I broke out (started working) we took six months to drill a hole. Hell, up here we move the rig (drill a hole) every ten days."

"When I first went down (in a mine) every man down there was an experienced miner - five, ten, twenty years in the mines. I've been out there (at another mine) longer than anybody, and I started there six months ago. They're all a bunch of kids. I worry about what'll happen if something goes wrong down there."

Men begin to plan job transfers (roughneck to driller, miner to welder). Later more drastic changes are considered. Despite seemingly good wages, they perceive they have very little to show for their work. A welder must have a good rig, and for years loan payments on the rig consume much of his extra money. Beyond the necessary rig, he has little. A family makes monthly payments on a mobile home, knowing that with depreciation it will be worth very little when it is finally paid off. Wages may be high, but periods between jobs deplete savings, especially when moves to a new job and a new community are required.

At this point the work-career cycle forks, separating the "upwardly mobile" from the "independent worker." Setting up a small, independent business becomes a desired goal for many men. Many young men have this in mind when they first begin working, but as the years go by it becomes less and less of an immediate concern. Then, after five to ten years, the desire resurfaces. Having one's own business eliminates bosses, movement, financial insecurity, lack of anything to really call one's own. The next few years are spent thinking about, planning, and often, venturing into an independent business.

The third phase of independent work is preceded by finding employment in a town or an area in which one hopes to establish a business. The impacted community is therefore depleted of men in this phase. One simply runs across an inordinately small number of men who began their work careers twelve to twenty years before. The men with whom the author worked, spent time in the bars, and otherwise met in the course of the field work were seldom in their mid-to-late thirties; this was a imperceptible cohort.

This phase is different for those men who effectively "move up" in their occupations, becoming bosses with new amenities and challenges. Lives

are made easier as value to the company is rewarded by promotion. These men begin a career at a new level of work, often retrained to handle administrative or more technical tasks. Authority and prestige increase, and style of life changes with expense accounts and bonuses. This phase is final for the these men; it continues, if they are successful, until retirement.

Beyond this phase of the career is a final one for the other group of men who tried and failed at their own businesses, or merely found that it was not as expected. One also finds men who have had other kinds of jobs elsewhere--farming, selling, military service, factory work, etc...--and desired or have been forced to seek new work in the middle of their lives. One finds men whose hope for an independent business never materialized, men who still think but are reluctant to talk of this. They are disgruntled, wistfully, or sometimes still hopeful. These men will be watchful for new opportunities and may find them. If not, they will work as they always have until they are too old, disabled or disillusioned to continue.

Career of Marriage-Family. Work career develops alongside that of marriage and family. Initially, two groups are distinguishable: the young married and the young unmarried. For both groups, the first few years of work offer many positive benefits. Young couples gain independence with their own incomes; other young couples are met and enjoyed; purchases are made that offer pleasure, security, and a sense of unity to the couple.

Young men may stay unattached for several years. Many of the young men are not graced with social skills or preoccupations that attract females, explaining in part why they are found in this particular setting. Most of these men eventually marry and become indistinguishable from other young couples. By the age of thirty-five, few men are not presently or have never

been married. Among the newcomer males formally interviewed, ninty-one were married, eighteen were presently single, and five were separated. Of the eighteen single men, only two were over thirty-five years of age; one of these two and six of the other eighteen had previously been married.

The early years of marriage pass into a second phase as children get older and new expectations develop between husbands and wives. The desire to live a more settled life is hardly unusual, especially when the children enter school. Lack of long-term friendships and discomfort in moving replaces the freedom and independence that were prized earlier. This 'crisis' point occurs at about the same time as one is entering the second phase of the work career; it is a time of rethinking and growing disaffection. A choice is often made to seek new employment which provides stability. Otherwise, separation and divorce may result.

Men, relating the disaffection common to this period, often speak of their wives "wanting to go back home" or "wanting more than I could give her." The term "breaking a woman in" or "breaking in a family" is heard frequently, meaning the wife and the children become accustomed to or learn to enjoy short-term jobs, moves every few months or years. This 'breaking in' process is, obviously, most difficult and least successful with frequent moves. The ratio of those ever divorced to those never divorced increases dramatically around the age of thirty (see Table I). Of five males who indicated they were separated, four were age twenty-five to twenty-nine. A decline in the number of individuals and an increase in the incidence of divorce and separation for men and women in their late twenties and early thirties points to an evolving situation where family and work intersect.

The marriage-family career continues with two groups of persons: divorced individuals and the 'broken-in' families. Many of those who

TABLE 1: Numbers and Ratios of New Residents in an Impacted Community Ever and Never Divorced, by Age and Sex, 1976.

	Males			Females		
	Ever Divorced	Never Divorced	Ratio	Ever Divorced	Never Divorced	Ratio
Ages						
18 - 24	5	21	1:4.2	5	21	1:4.2
25 - 29	7	26	1:3.7	5	17	1:3.4
30 - 34	8	10	1:1.3	6	9	1:1.5
35 - 39	5	5	1:1	2	6	1:3
40 - 44	1	7	1:7	1	6	1:6
45 - 49	4	4	1:1	2	4	1:2
50 - 59	2	4	1:2	1	2	1:2
60+	0	3	-	0	1	-
TOTALS	32	80	1:2.5	22	66	1:3

divorce attempt a second marriage. Some of the men find wives who are more willing to be 'broken-in'. Others are less successful.

One might expect that these divorced women would leave the community and/or this way of life, remarrying only when certain that a new marriage will result in more stability. This does not seem to be the case. Table I shows that divorce rates are equally high for women and for men. Based on earlier expectations one would have predicted a much lower divorce rate for women, if most of the female partners of a dissolved marriage had moved elsewhere. Since divorce rates are roughly equal, it is likely that a woman will remarry a man whose first divorce was for much the same reasons as her own.

Two things may result: the man may have learned from his first experience and therefore make a more lasting bond; or, he may be unable or unwilling to make the necessary adjustments. His second wife, in turn, may be more willing to be 'broken in'; she may adjust her expectations and outlook in light of her first divorce. She has realized the difficulty of living unattached to a man, raising the children alone, and has become more willing to put up with things as they are. Much of the fieldwork indicates a 'mellowing' process, a process by which a woman becomes more accustomed to or tolerant of the situation she faces. Hence, the second phase does not mean that women drop out of the picture. Rather, they either stay married and are 'broken in' or they marry again.[5]

When a single (usually divorced) man reaches his late thirties, a choice is made. Possibly he has moved up in a company's hierarchy and can therefore attract a wife by offering her a stable home as well as a home away from home with him. It is not unusual for a man in this position to have a wife and family in another state; they live with him only part of the year. When the children are grown, the wife will join her husband for much or all of the year; they

return home only on holidays or vacations. The man who has 'broken-in' his wife and family may also adopt this mode of life if he can afford it.

If a man has not moved into such a position with the company, his work usually becomes less and less challenging. Men ten to fifteen years his junior are working alongside him, making the same money. He has a decision to make: continuing his work, rejecting women altogether or waiting for the right woman to come along; or, leaving this work, seeking a more stable job and starting a family before he passes that threshold barring him from it forever. The need for stability encourages him to start his own business.

Overlap of Cycles. That these two cycles overlap at crucial points may indicate why certain decisions are made when they are. The first phase is relatively smooth in both work and marriage-family spheres. The growing disaffection with instability in the second phase of the family career corresponds with the greater desire for independence in one's work. Still, a man has mastered his trade and may well be disinclined to leave it. The ambivalence between seeking more independence (that may cause one to more readily quit a job) and mastering a job conflicts with the family's desire for more permanence.[6]

By the third phase of the work cycle, one's family may be 'broken in', in which case life may continue as it has in the past. For others, a new, independent job may be undertaken, depending on financial and other constraints and how strongly it is desired. For the single man this point offers a last chance to establish a family. He looks for a more stable job such as that of an independent businessman in the trade: a contractor, running a bulk plant, managing a supply shop, etcetera. If he does not find a stable job his family opportunities diminish. His only hope is to catch a 'broken in' woman on the rebound.

Conclusion

The working class in the United States is no better understood nor is it more poorly understood than the middle class, the poor or the rich. It is, however, frequently misunderstood. This is certain for new workers in impacted areas of the Rocky Mountain states. Why this is the case is beyond the scope of this paper. It seems, however, that several things contribute.

The exterior of newcomers' homes and neighborhoods are usually not attractive. They certainly fail to match Veblen's description of the "estates" of the "dolicho-blond" race, both of the upper class and their emulators. Mobile homes, sings Jimmy Buffett, are "...ugly and square. They don't belong here. They looked a lot better as beer cans."[7] Mobile homes mean transiency, home on wheels, impermanence, noncommittment to the community, outsider. This is inaccurate for the majority of the new people who can afford and would prefer a conventional home, but who must, of necessity, live in mobile homes. Nothing else is available or affordable. Frequent moves are seldom a matter of choice. The mobile home is convenient and inexpensive; movement is possible. If movement was not possible, wages would have to be significantly increased or jobs would have to be restructured. These two possibilities are seldom entertained by energy companies.

Newcomers are strangers in impacted communities. They often bring new ways to the community. Seventy-two percent of the newcomer men interviewed had grown up in another state, while eighty percent had lived in the study community less than two years. These new people are not readily accepted or assimilated into the community.

Why the local people feel distance and hesitancy toward the newcomers is understandable. Why they foster certain ideas about newcomers is also understandable. These ideas, however, are generally less inaccurate and more

reasonable, than the ideas and attitudes of many academics and social service administrators. The "Gillette Syndrome" and the "4-Ds" have been accepted as reality. This has occurred in large part because few attempts have been made to understand the structural conditions confronting new workers and their families in impacted western communities.

There are some fairly good reasons why people live the lives they do. People are not totally free to live as they wish, nor even to wish as they might. There is order even in what seems to be chaos in impacted communities, and there is order to the lives of the people involved. There are some good, though hardly simple, reasons why the newcomers 'live like they do', reasons that emerge when one looks at the careers of work and marriage-family. Phases and processes seem to be at work, for one's *changing* relationships and conceptions are crucial to the alternatives one seeks and the choices one makes. This process conception involves alignment of persons at various points in careers as well as gathering past remembrances and future plans. These data are meaningful when conceptualized as configurations of work and marriage-family. They reveal particulars about this population and the fundamental importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of work and non-work.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The estimated population, the source of most journalistic announcements was an underestimation. The final figures showed that Wyoming had in fact grown in population between 1960 and 1970 - to 332,000 people - by about two thousand persons. Wyoming remains today the next to the least populous state with less than four persons per square mile.

[2]The project was made possible through the funding and support of the Center for the Study of Metropolitan Problems, National Institute of Mental Health, Rockville, Maryland. Begun in May 1976, the field work was carried out full-time until mid-August and part-time through the fall of 1976. A second phase of the project began in May, 1977. Field work was carried out in the summer of 1977 and final analysis will be completed this fall.

[3]The persons new to impacted areas are here referred to as "new people" and "newcomers" for a deliberate reason. They have been variously called: boomers, transients, gypsies, and drifters. All of these terms carry connotations that may stunt a clear understanding of this population. They are also terms that are variously used (with some accuracy) to describe certain portions of the subject population but are inaccurate when applied to the population as a whole.

[4]In this case, those separated are treated as couples, though the marital partners are not living together.

[5]The occurrence of remarriages among the study population suggests that they form something of an occupational community (cf. Blauner, 1966). This concept is seldom used in the American literature but may prove most useful in understanding the subject population.

[6]Why some men feel they can change jobs and others do not is a question in need of an answer. Unfortunately, this research can only raise the issue and not answer it.

[7]Jimmy Buffett, "Migration" ABC/Dunhill Music, Inc. (BMI).

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